



BOOK REVIEW OF *PAPER TOWNS*

WRITTEN BY JOHN GREEN

A FINAL PROJECT

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement
For S-1 Degree in American Cultural Studies
In English Department, Faculty of Humanities
Diponegoro University

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SEMARANG

2018

PRONOUNCEMENT

The writer state truthfully that he compiled this final project by himself without taking the results from other research in any university, in diploma, S-1, S-2, or S-3 degree. In addition, the writer ascertains that he does not take the material from other publications or someone's work except for the references mentioned in bibliography.

Semarang, 24 July, 2018

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MOTTO AND DEDICATION

BLACKPINK in your area

(Jennie Kim)

This final project is dedicated to

My parents and

My friends who helped me accomplished this final project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Praise be to God Almighty, who has given strength and true spirit so this final project on “Book Review of Paper Towns Written by John Green” came to a completion. On this occasion, the writer would like to thank all those people who have contributed to the completion of this research report.

The deepest gratitude and appreciation are extended to Drs. Jumino, M. Lib, M. Hum – my advisor-who has given his continuous guidance, helpful correction, moral support, advice and suggestion, without which it is doubtful that this thesis came into completion.

The writer also would like to convey his sincere gratitude to the following:

1. Dr. Redyanto Noor, M.Hum., the Dean of Faculty of Humanities Diponegoro University.
2. Dr. Agus Subiyanto, M.A., the Head of English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University.
3. All of the lecturers in English Department.
4. The writer’s parents and brother, for their support and motivation.
5. The writer’s friends in Class B of English Department 2011 and the whole class of English Department 2011. Thank you for the journey and memories.
6. The writer’s best friends in JOEWONG, Hariyo Jati, Bagus Pamungkas, Fitriyadi Sulistiyono, Miftah Faris Dimyati, and Willy Fitriyanto. Thank you for the supports and memories.
7. KKN group of Tugu, Sayung, 2015. Thank you for all of the experience, knowledge, and memories.

8. The writer's best friend, Odie Faiz Guzlan, for personally encouraging the writer until graduation.
9. Faculty of Humanities Choir. Thank you for all these amazing years and journey.

The writer realizes that this final project is still far from perfect. Therefore, the writer will gladly receive any constructive criticism and recommendation to make this final project better. Finally, the writer hopes that this final project will be useful for the readers.

Semarang, 24 July 2018

Raden Indra Sukmana

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1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is spoken or written work where certain characteristics include originality, artistry, and beauty of content and expressions. Literature is created by the creative minds of a man's imagination. The creative minds come from the pictures of events and life which is then embodied into words. Literature itself comprises of a few kinds, which include poetry, novel, short story, and drama. (Sudjiman, 1986: 68)

This final project will review one of a popular book from John Green published in 2008, *Paper Towns*. This novel is written in first person point of view of a teenager throughout the story. Green uses plenty examples of figurative language that makes the reader very attentive as if he understands what teenagers are going through. This novel is recommended for people who like to uncover clues and hints that became the major plot of the book.

From the writer's standpoint, this review will give both strength and weaknesses regarding the contents of the book. By reviewing *Paper Towns*, the writer hope that the content of the book will be more intelligible to the readers.

1.1. Purpose of the study

The following are the purposes of this review:

1. To find out the strengths and weaknesses of the novel.
2. To obtain the message of the novel.

1.2. Biography of the Author

John Green is an American author, vlogger, producer, and editor. He is *The New York Times*' bestselling author of the novels '*Looking for Alaska*,' '*An Abundance of Katherines*,' '*Paper Towns*,' and '*The Fault in Our Stars*.' According to The New York Times in its site www.nytimes.com/2008/book/bestsellers, his books have been translated and published in more than 55 languages, and over 24 million copies have been published. Green, who has won several awards for his books, is a major critic of his own books. Critics have credited him for creating a new direction in the young adult fiction world.

Green was born on August 24, 1977, in Indianapolis, Indiana. He spent his childhood moved from one city to another, before finally settled in Orlando, Florida. He graduated with double major in English and Religious Studies from Kenyon College in 2000. He worked as a critique for the New York Times Book Review and also reviewed hundreds of books as a publishing assistant in Chicago. Green intended to become a priest, but his experiences of working in hospital with life-threatening illness patients inspired him to become an author. Green currently lives in Indianapolis with his wife, Sarah Urist and their two children. (The Famous People, 2018, www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/john-green, 13 February, 2018)

According to Green's own website www.johngreenbooks.com/paper-towns, *Paper Towns* is his third book that debuted at number five on *The New York Times* bestseller list and was awarded the 2009 *Edgar Award* for best Young

Adult Mystery novel. This book is taught in many high schools and colleges, along with Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, which is an important plot point within the book. The movie adaptation of *Paper Towns* was released on July 2015, starring Nat Wolff and Cara Delevingne.

2. SUMMARY OF THE BOOK

Paper Towns is a story of coming-of-age teenagers that follows the lives of two childhood friends, Quentin "Q" Jacobsen and Margo Roth Spiegelman. When they are nine years old, Quentin and Margo discover a dead body while cycling in the park. Quentin wants to forget what he sees and move on, while Margo is curious and goes to investigate, only to find that the dead man has committed suicide.

Nine years later, Quentin and Margo are no longer a close friend and barely talk to each other since they found the dead body. Margo is a glamorous and popular girl amongst her colleagues. Quentin is not alone as he has excellent friends, Radar and Ben. One night, Margo sneaks into Quentin's room and asks him a favor. She finds out that her boyfriend, Jase, cheated on her with her best friend, Becca. She asks Quentin to borrow his mom's car, driving around all night planning and seeking revenge on her now ex-boyfriend. After the plan succeeds, Margo takes Quentin to a downtown SunTrust building with an overview of Orlando. She tells him that Orlando is a *paper town* with *paper people*, full of superficial people that go around every day and become what society wants them to be. At this time, Quentin feels their relationship has blossomed.

The next day, Margo isn't at school. While it is not the first time she is missing, Quentin thinks that this time it is different. One weekend, Margo's parents arrive at Quentin's house accompanied by a detective who authorize to investigate Margo's disappearance. Margo's parents mention about her habit of leaving vague clues of her whereabouts each time she runs away. Along with Ben and Radar, Quentin goes to Margo's room and uncover some clues, which include a collection of poetry *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman.

On the next day, Quentin have been thinking over two lines in one of Whitman's poem "*Song of Myself*" which urge the reader to remove doors from their hinges, and he assume that it must have hold other clues. Lacey, Margo's friend, approach Quentin and his friends ask if they know anything about her disappearance. Using clues form Whitman's poem, Quentin remove his own bedroom door off its hinges and find a scrap of paper with an address printed on it. That night, Quentin, Radar, and Ben drive to the address that leads to an abandoned mall. Inside, they discover some graffiti that written: "*YOU WILL GO TO THE PAPER TOWNS AND YOU WILL NEVER COME BACK.*" Quentin began to think that Margo may kill herself.

Quentin, Ben, and Radar keep coming back to the abandoned mall to search for more clues. One day, he discovers a map of New York and push pins on the wall of the room. While holding the map of New York up to the pins, he figures out that they make a line of places on the map. He thinks Margo might intend to travel and want him to find her. One place that catches his attention is Agloe, New York. Further research shows that Agloe is one of the "*paper towns*", a fake town

created by map maker. On the page of *Omnidictionary*, it shows that the town has one population with a note that says, “*One until May 29th at noon*”. Quentin think it must be Margo and he must find her.

Quentin, Ben, Radar, and Lacey skip their graduation party and head out on a twenty-one hours of road trip to find Margo. After such a long adventure, they arrive at Agloe only to find an abandoned barn with Margo inside. Much to their surprise, Margo is furious as she wishes not to be found. Quentin stay with Margo, while the others storm out in anger. Margo and Quentin spend the rest of the day together, talking about their journey of the past three weeks since she disappears. Quentin wants Margo to come back to Orlando with him. However, Margo has change along her journey. She is tired of being what everyone think and want her to be.

In the end, Quentin and Margo realize that they have different path in life. They both know that their relationship would never be back like they used to, and Margo would continue her journey on her own.

3. REVIEW OF THE BOOK

Every literature has a major factor in its strength and weaknesses that distinguish itself from one another. Intrinsic elements of literature, that represents the point of the whole story, has its own strength and weaknesses in shaping the whole book. In this chapter, the writer would like to comprehensively illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of the novel *Paper Towns*.

3.1. The Strengths

Intrinsic elements are structural developments that comes from within the genre. According to Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, intrinsic aspects are the interpretation and analysis of the works of literature themselves (1977: 139). In prose, the intrinsic elements are theme, setting, character, point of view, and plot. The strengths of this book are themes and characters.

The themes of this book particularly deals with the problems that linger around teenager and prejudices against them. In this book, when a person's perception on someone else could lead to a false imagery on someone's persona, or when their friendship is tested by the journey on finding someone who is missing. It is interesting that the entire theme of this book became a signature of what makes its strength and selling point.

The characters of *Paper Towns* show their own charm and characteristic that makes the book interesting to follow.

3.1.1. Theme

Theme is the fundamental idea of the story, serving as a unifying element while giving shape and effect in the reader's mind to make the story easy to follow. A theme could indicate as a general explanation about people or life, and may be stated directly or indirectly by the writer through dialogue.

Paper Towns has plenty of themes that show the essence of teenage life in looking for identity and facing the prejudices of their surroundings. There are few themes that the writer would like to bring out to the readers.

3.1.1.1. Perception

Throughout the book, Quentin started to lose his sense of reality as his obsession over Margo is getting way too much. His affection towards Margo can be seen as follows:

“The thing about Margo Roth Spiegelman is that really all I could ever do was let her talk, and then when she stopped talking encourage her to go on, due to the facts that 1. I was incontestably in love with her, and 2. She was absolutely unprecedented in every way, and 3. She never really asked me any questions, so the only way to avoid silence was to keep her talking.” (Green, 2008: 32)

The quotation above shows how much Quentin love the Margo that he saw that night to the point that sees her as a perfectly unprecedented. Quentin idolizes the image of Margo that he clings to as their childhood memories, but in reality Margo has abandoned that image of her.

When Quentin started to uncover the clues Margo left behind, there’s a huge realization that all this time he was wrong. His perception of Margo suddenly changed.

“The fundamental mistake I had always made-and that she had, in fairness, always led me to make-was this: Margo was not a miracle. She was not an adventure. She was not a fine and precious thing. She was a girl.” (Green, 2008: 199)

The quotation above shows how Quentin finally understands that Margo is just a girl, not a miracle as his false perception wanted her to be. *Just remember that sometimes, the way you think about a person isn’t the way they actually are.* (Green, 2008: 266)

3.1.1.2. Searching for Identity

Paper Towns follows the idea of coming-of-age teenager looking for their identity, just like Green's previous works. In this book, Margo often referencing the concept of "strings" as a metaphor of something that hold a person together. The "strings" represents the concept of inner peace and emotional stability of a person. In the prologue, when a young Quentin and Margo found a deceased body of Robert Joyner, Margo think that the strings are an identity of a person. *Maybe all the strings inside him broke.* (Green, 2008: 8)

Years later, after doing act of adventurous vandalism with Quentin, Margo confessed that she felt like everything around her is made of paper. She is mad when everyone she knew betrayed her.

"Maybe things would have been different for me if I'd been hanging out with you the whole time instead of—ugh. Just, God. I just hate myself so much for even caring about my, quote, friends. I mean, just so you know, it's not that I am oh-so-upset about Jason. Or Becca. Or even Lacey, although I actually liked her. But it was the last string. It was a lame string, for sure, but it was the one I had left, and every paper girl needs at least one string, right?" (Green, 2008: 58)

The quotation above shows how furious Margo is at everything around her, every paper thing that made her a paper girl, a boring two-dimensional person. *People love the idea of a paper girl. They always have.* (Green, 2008: 293) When Margo disappears, she starts looking for paper towns, because she felt that a paper town is where a paper girl became real.

"And Agloe is a place where a paper creation became real. A dot on the map became a real place, more real than the people who created the dot could ever have imagined." (Green, 2008: 294)

The idea of paper town is somewhat a metaphor for Margo. She feels like always trying to find the perfect image of herself, just like how the people around her wanted her to be. She loves the idea of being a paper girl for a while, but then the pressure makes her run away from her paper self, so that she can find her true identity.

3.1.1.3. Friendship

Paper Towns shows that friendships are the central theme of the book, often found much more intimate than any other kind of relationship. At the beginning of the book, Quentin, while seemingly pretty close to his friends Ben and Radar, failed to appreciate them, as his affection towards Margo overshadowed his friendships. Eventually, Quentin realize that his friendship with Ben and Radar are much more fulfilling than chasing the shadows of Margo.

“I wonder if she created this journey for us on purpose or by accident--regardless, it’s the most fun I’ve ever had since the last time I spent hours behind the wheel of a minivan.” (Green, 2008: 246)

When on the journey following Margo’s clues, Quentin realize that maybe the journey was meant for him to get close and appreciate his friend’s effort on finding Margo together.

3.1.2. Character

Character is an image created by the author of the book as a representation of a human being. Through each character’s dialogue, actions, and appearance in the narrative text, the reader could recognize and understand them.

Every character in *Paper Towns* has a varying degree of personalities that makes the entire book interesting and fulfilling. By depicting the hardships of teenage life in finding their identity, Green is trying to relate to the readers, especially the young adult ones.

3.1.2.1. Quentin Jacobsen

Quentin Jacobsen is the protagonist and narrator of the book. His character is considered normal if not predictable. A smart and diligent student, he really likes routines as if it's in his blood. *I liked routine. I liked being bored. I didn't want to, but I did.* (Green, 2008: 23-24)

His most notable trait is perhaps his lack of confidence, a trait he tried to change while being alone with Margo. His contrasting nature from Margo is shown in the beginning of the book. As the story goes, Margo started to notice that Quentin was different, shown on quotation below:

“You had been a paper boy to me all these years - two dimensions as a character on the page and two different, but still flat, dimensions as a person. But that night you turned out to be real.” (Green, 2008: 292)

Quentin has the most growth in character development throughout the story. His character goes from an average straight A student, to having an interesting perspective on everything. His adventure with Margo gives him the power to think and a view on things such as how people are and how they live their life. *Everyone demented with the mania of owning things.* (Green, 2008: 57-58)

3.1.2.2. Margo Roth Spiegelman

Margo is considered as the antagonist and the center of the story. Quentin's childhood friend and a free-spirited girl known for her adventurous trait and extravagant schemes. While Quentin is stay true to the rules, Margo often break the rules to satisfy her adventurous mind. *Remind me if breaking and entering is a felony.* (Green, 2008: 26)

Initially, Margo shows herself as an interesting, unique character. When Quentin confront her about the future, she thinks that the future are boring and not worth the hassle.

It is hard to describe Margo's character in the beginning of the story as her entire image comes from Quentin's narrative perspective and his idolization towards her "perfect" imagery. This provides the central conflict when Quentin's image of Margo started to fall apart toward the end and uncover the real Margo: a troubled, lonesome, and directionless girl.

"I thought of my Margo, and Lacey's Margo, and Mrs. Spiegelman's Margo, and all of us looking at her reflection in different fun house mirrors." (Green, 2008: 214)

By the end of the book, Margo's character shows us that she is a mirror, that reflects of what other people wanted to see in her. Margo is a different person depending on who is she around with. She is a mere person that everyone makes her out to be and wants to see.

3.2. The Weaknesses

While this book shows us the strength of its theme and character, there are a few notable weaknesses that plague the reading experience. The plot is one of the weaknesses that is noticeable when the reader started to reach the middle of the book. The ending is another glaring weakness that left the reader confused with the relationship between Margo and Quentin.

3.2.1. Dramatic Plot

Paper Towns splits its plot into three parts, The Strings, The Grass, and The Vessel. The first part successfully created an escalating pace of a rising action that follows the adventure of Margo and Quentin. However, the second part, while the novel introduces us with the conflict of each character in decoding the clues that Margo left behind, it slows down the pace that it bore the readers with uncommon terms that should have been explained before getting into climax. Nonetheless, the pace starts to pick up again with a major discovery near the end.

3.2.2. Unexpected Ending

Another weakness is the ending. While it ends in such an unexpected way with metaphor that recur throughout the story, it feels like an unfinished ending for the readers. John Green could elaborate a little on what happened to Quentin and Margo after they parted ways, or what happened when they got back from Agloe skipping their graduation party. The movie adaptation however, fixes this abrupt ending for a longer moment between Quentin and his best friends.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the review above, the writer is able to draw conclusion on the strength and weaknesses of the novel. The strength of the novel consist of themes that revolving around the issues on each character's perception, the bonds between their friendship, and their struggle to find their identity throughout the book.

Paper Towns shows great potential and amazing character development on each of its character. Supporting character like Ben and Radar helps Quentin with his quest while showing tremendous character development, making them an interesting character to follow.

Finally, *Paper Towns* demonstrate John Green's experience in writing a book about the issues around teenage life and their pursuit of identity just like his previous work. The strong attachment between each lead and supporting characters makes the story a joy to follow through. There are few distinct writing styles of Green's that would probably make any first-time readers confused if they never read his previous work before. Nonetheless, this book is one fine examples of John Green's works.

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